

March 24, 2006

TO: Members of the AISD Board of Trustees

FROM: Representatives from the Becker Campus Advisory Council, PTA, Bouldin Creek Neighborhood Association, and Bouldin community

RE.: Alternative Option A. for Becker Elementary (“Keep Becker open; expand to create a tuition-based, open enrollment pre-kindergarten program in August 2006. Evaluate results in May 2008.”)

Representatives from the Becker Campus Advisory Council, PTA, Bouldin Creek Neighborhood Association, and the Bouldin community have collaborated on a draft action plan to increase enrollment at Becker Elementary. This memorandum addresses just one feature of that draft plan. We agree that increasing enrollment at Becker will require significant planning, and we are prepared to undertake that level of work and depth of change. However, we believe that the following option for August 2006 offers a way that the Becker campus can remain a viable elementary while the community undertakes a longer planning effort: an expansion of Becker’s pre-kindergarten program to create a tuition-based, open enrollment program.

Based on information from the Success by 6 white paper on pre-kindergarten centers, AISD memos and reports, the 2/23/06 board development meeting on pre-kindergarten centers, and other research, such an expansion reflects sound principles and mirrors successful models.

We also believe this expansion represents a point of intersection between the community’s goal of retaining Becker as an elementary school and the following AISD goals:

- Revenue generated by accepting tuition could lower the overall cost of educating students at Becker Elementary to the district average. If only 2 classes were added to Becker’s existing program of 2 pre-K and 3 PPCD classes, the monthly tuition realized for 20 new students at \$575 each would total at least \$11,500 per month, or \$92,000 annually for an eight-month period. After an estimated deduction of \$66,000 for two teacher salaries and classroom materials, the district could realize a minimum profit of \$26,000 in the first year if it adds only two classes.

- The pre-kindergarten program at Becker now only serves children who meet statutory guidelines based on low income or limited English proficiency. Expanding the program to include children who do not meet these guidelines would increase the economic, ethnic, and racial diversity of the student population, thus enriching the educational experience for all students.

- Opening Becker to a wider group of children at an earlier age would encourage parents to keep their children at that campus for elementary school and would thus increase overall enrollment. At the AISD board development meeting on February 23, consultant Armando Almendarez described the success the Chicago public schools had achieved in urban neighborhoods that, like Bouldin Creek, were undergoing significant economic shifts. According to Mr. Almendarez, expanding pre-kindergarten programs in Chicago “helped serve the needs of gentrifying communities” and “met the educational and child care needs of those communities.” By opening pre-kindergarten to students whose parents could afford to pay tuition, Chicago public schools lured middle class, newer residents in those fast-gentrifying neighborhoods into the public school system. Once parents had a successful experience at the pre-kindergarten level in a neighborhood school, they tended to leave their children in that school.

- While the expansion would meet a community need for additional child care options, the numbers of children would be limited so as to not significantly impact the private child care industry. Students would be recruited from the neighborhood, but the program would be marketed to parents who work downtown and would like to have their children in a nearby program.

- Bouldin Creek children would continue to have access to a pre-kindergarten program at a neighborhood school, a goal recognized by the TEEM (Texas Early Education Model) legislation, the Austin Child Care Council, and other organizations and experts as increasing parental involvement.

The district has identified pre-kindergarten as an important way to close achievement gaps among student groups. The alternative proposed by the Becker/Bouldin community expands the existing pre-kindergarten program in new directions, providing opportunities as well to expand the special education/inclusion services available in this area of town. This alternative reflects the community's interest in maintaining and enhancing its neighborhood school at the same time it serves the district's interest in lowering the costs of educating Becker students. And perhaps most importantly, it serves the mutual goal of both groups in creating a more diverse student body and thus providing Becker students with a richer educational experience.